Faith communities are signs of hope

By Bishop Matthew H. Clark

It's bitter cold this Monday. The wind is strong; there is snow in the air and ice on the roads. It's not the very best day to go out, but life seems to being going on pretty much as normal in the region.

I have spent most of the day in the office, dividing my time between appointments and the ordinary paperwork and correspondence of the day.

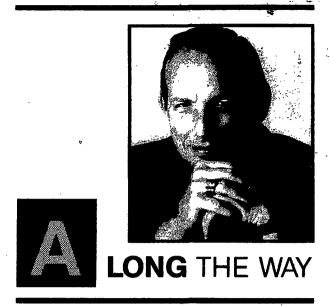
Down the corridor, a volunteer committee of our priests is working on an important long-range program we're developing. Across the hall from them another group is working on professional development for pastoral ministers.

In about an hour our Diocesan Stewardship Council will gather for its quarterly meeting. This able and generous group of leaders will have a substantial agenda today as they offer their talent and experience to help the church develop and use wisely the resources we need to advance our common mission.

I look forward to the entire meeting, but I am especially glad that today's agenda includes an opportunity for a substantial discussion between the council and Tim Dwyer, our new superintendent of schools.

Tim will begin the conversation with a presentation about the current state of our schools and the leadership initiatives he is taking. I have no doubt that the council will

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enrich the conversation with constructive questions and suggestions. It will be a rewarding exchange. I'm so happy that it happens during Catholic Schools Week.

Yesterday I had a most enjoyable opportunity to visit Holy Apostles Parish on Lyell Avenue in Rochester. I presided and preached at the 8:30 a.m. Mass and also at the 11 a.m. Mass during which I confirmed 14 young women and men.

The weather was severe yesterday, too, but the people of Holy Apostles brought great warmth to their parish celebrations. And it seemed to me that they conveyed a special sense of support and affection for those who were confirmed.

As so many know, that section of

Rochester has been experiencing something of the winter of violence that has touched so many areas of our nation. Among the reasons I'm grateful to the people of Holy Apostles is the reminder they were to me yesterday that there is much that is good and strong and hopeful in areas that experience special challenges at a given time.

Such communities of faith are signs of hope and special sources of stability for others. As such, they merit our gratitude and all of the encouragement we can give them.

As I write these words, I think of the scriptural theme of our diocesan Statement of Mission and Goals which is guiding us through the completion of our Synod.

"The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to bring good tidings to the afflicted; the Lord has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound; to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor" (Luke 4:18-19).

To be sure, the brokenhearted and captives, the afflicted and prisoners are in all of our communities. They can be any of us and all of us. We can't make all problems go away. But we are not where I believe the Lord wants us to be if we fail in our efforts to identify and stand with those among us who are most in need.

Peace to all.



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